

Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges

Commission on Schools

Setting World Standards for Accreditation



School Improvement Process Accreditation Standards
for
Elementary Schools
Middle Level Schools
High School
K-12 Schools
and
Special Purpose Schools

www2.boisestate.edu/naas

The Mission of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges,
Commission on Schools, is to Ensure Excellence in Education by
Holding Schools Accountable to Rigorous Standards and a Process of
Continual Improvement.



HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The Northwest Association of Secondary and Higher Schools was formed as a voluntary organization on April 5, 1917 with a membership of 25 secondary schools and eight higher institutions in four northwestern states. By December 2000, this membership increased to 1577 schools and 154 colleges. Presently, the organization functions in seven states: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington and in several foreign countries around the world. It developed as one of six regional associations of secondary and higher schools organized between 1885 and 1962. In January 1996, the Commission on Schools of the Northwest Association became a member of the International Council of School Accreditation Commissions, Inc. (ICSAC) which includes all six of the regional associations recognized by the United States Department of Education. In December 1974, the title of the Association was changed to: Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. The Secondary Commission is now known as the Commission on Schools.

PURPOSES

The purposes of the Northwest Association, as stated in the Articles of Incorporation are to:

1. Advance the cause of education in the schools and colleges of the Northwest.
2. Develop educational policies and activities that will extend and improve educational opportunities and services.
3. Develop criteria of evaluation that will continually stimulate, evaluate, and accredit vital educational efforts.
4. Promote cooperative relationships among colleges and schools in order to attain these ends.

The Association implements these purposes through constructive and continual effort. Member schools are accredited on the basis of standards developed by the Commission on Schools. Each member school is required to participate in self- and team-evaluations during each six-year period using some means of self-evaluation approved by the State Accreditation Committee. Member schools are required to accept credits from schools accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, North Central Association of Schools and Colleges, New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and Western Association of Schools and Colleges, subject to state laws. The Commission publishes newsletters, research reports, web pages, and pamphlets that are widely distributed.

ORGANIZATION

The officers of the Association include the President, First Vice President, and Second Vice President, each of whom is a member of and entitled to vote on the Board of Trustees. The First Vice President is a member of the Commission on Schools and the Second Vice President is from the Commission on Colleges. The Board also includes three representatives elected by the Commission on Schools, and three representatives elected by the Commission on Colleges, for a total of nine members. The Board of Trustees appoints a non-voting Executive Secretary/Treasurer. The Board serves as the governing body of the Association during the interim of annual business meetings and assumes responsibilities for the good of the organization.

The organization of the Association provides for two Commissions: a Commission on Schools and a Commission on Colleges.

Commission on Schools

The Commission on Schools consists of the combined State Accreditation Committees from all the member states, one at-large representative for non-public schools, one at-large representative for higher education, and four at-large public representatives. Each State Accreditation Committee consists of four (4) members elected for a term of three (3) years, with at least one (1) elected annually. One (1) of the four (4) members in each state may be a representative of the State Department of Education in that state.

The Commission on Schools is charged with the responsibility of affecting the purposes of the Association as they pertain to schools. In some respects the Commission on Schools may be considered a separate entity; it is empowered to draw up and adopt its own set of bylaws that governs its work and procedures. Such bylaws must conform to the *Articles of Incorporation* and *Bylaws* of the Association.

It is the specific responsibility of the Commission on Schools to recommend by mail ballot to the member schools the necessary standards that shall apply to member schools.

The Chair of the Commission on Schools presides at all meetings. The Chair is responsible for the Commission's function and must report the proceedings of the Commission on Schools to the Association. The Chair is empowered to appoint committees essential to complete the work of the Commission.

INTRODUCTION

The Commission on Schools accredits elementary schools, middle level schools, high schools, K-12 schools, special purpose schools, travel study, foreign nation, American international, supplementary education schools (SES), and distance education schools (DES). Elementary, middle level, high school, K-12 and special purpose schools are specifically defined within this report. The Commission on Schools' supplementary education schools and distance education schools are described in the SES and DES Standards and Annual Report Forms, respectively. Accreditation procedures are virtually identical, regardless of type or classification, and standards are consistent. The definitions for accreditation should be looked upon as guidelines with the final determination of classification resting with the State Accreditation Committee.

Although it is a purpose of an accrediting association to develop certain basic standards for the approval of schools, it is recognized by the Commission on Schools that desirable variations will occur in the purposes and programs of institutions. Standards and procedures are sufficiently flexible to provide for these variations within a common framework of conditions for quality education.

It is the policy of the Commission on Schools to recognize that schools under consideration of being "Dropped" due to departures from specific standards must prove excellence. It is the responsibility of the member school and of the State Accreditation Committee to submit such information **annually**, as the Commission may require, to support the school's claim of general excellence. The Commission on Schools, through research and study, shall continue to seek to improve its standards, to make them stimulating, and make them conducive to the educational advancement of its member schools.

STANDARDS

The standards for member schools include minimum requirements that have been substantiated by research, experience, or the judgment of experienced educators as basic requirements for a satisfactory program of education.

The Commission on Schools will recognize the need for flexibility in applying the standards in order to provide for changes in curriculum content, improved methods of instruction, and experimental programs. Any deviation by schools from the standards for the purpose of pilot programs, educational research, or experimental projects **shall** first be approved by the State Accreditation Committee (SAC). The summary of approved projects **shall** be submitted as a part of the next annual report and **shall** include, but not be limited to:

1. Aims and objectives of the project and an explanation of how it fits into the complete school program.
2. An explanation of how the project results in deviation from specific standards.
3. Anticipated duration of the project.
4. Methods to be used in evaluating results of the project and any conclusions reached.

When making the transition to new provisions of the standards, member schools will be allowed a reasonable period of time, as approved by the SAC, to achieve complete compliance, as long as there is evidence that yearly progress is being made. Schools making application for membership must substantially comply with the current standards. The applicant must be approved, accredited, licensed, or recognized by the legally constituted educational agency in its state or by a government agency.

PROCEDURES

New Members

1. Schools seeking membership in the Association **shall**:
 - a. Submit an official application form and fee containing the resolution by the governing body (Board of Trustees, Board of Education, or Board of Directors) approving the application and accepting the regulations, standards, and principles of the Association to the SAC by October 15. (Some states such as Idaho and Oregon have earlier deadlines, however.) Application forms may be obtained from the SAC or the Executive Director of the Commission on Schools. The SAC will review and make recommendations to the Commission on Schools.
 - b. Submit this completed *Annual Report to the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges* to the SAC before October 15.
 - c. Submit to the SAC certification that: (1) the school has completed within the preceding three years a self-evaluation using evaluation instruments approved by the SAC, and (2) a Response Team has reviewed the appraisal made in the self-evaluation. Applicants must substantially meet the standards established by the Association.
 - d. Be approved, accredited, licensed, or recognized by the legally constituted educational agency in its state or by a government agency.
 - e. Make payment for the annual dues to the Commission on Schools of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. The office of the Executive Director will mail dues statements to all newly admitted members after each annual business meeting. The dues year runs from September 1 to August 31. New members are accepted at the annual business meeting in December and their first year of membership extends through August 31.

Candidate Membership may be granted to applicant schools that would otherwise be approved for membership, with the understanding that the self-evaluation be completed within three years of the date of application. Candidate members are not entitled to vote on the mail ballot. All candidate members must undergo a preliminary visit by a member of the SAC prior to being accepted as a candidate member.

2. Other Policies Pertaining to Admission
 - a. A newly organized school must be in operation in its own building before applying for membership.
 - b. When two or more schools combine to form a new school, the resulting school shall be required to apply for membership as a new school.
 - c. When a member school divides and forms a new school, the new school is required to apply for membership as a new member.
 - d. When a member school absorbs other schools, member or non-member, the newly formed school continues its membership, provided it can meet the standards of the Association, and provided it conducts an approved self-evaluation within three years.
 - e. Schools not categorized above shall be considered on an individual basis by the SAC.
 - f. The SAC **shall** request an assessment of a new school's eligibility for membership candidacy by conducting a preliminary visit prior to accepting the school as a candidate member.

Current Members

The principal or director of each member school submits this *Annual Report to the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges* to the SAC Chair. This report is due by October 15 of each year. The SAC reviews and evaluates the report and then recommends a classification to the Commission on Schools. The Commission on Schools then establishes the classification for each member school.

Classification Ratings

Based on evaluations made by the SAC’s, schools are “Approved,” “Advised,” “Warned,” or “Dropped” from the list of accredited schools. The SAC considers the significance of deviations in assigning ratings. A member school is considered “Withdrawn” when it voluntarily chooses to discontinue its membership.

A school is classified as “Approved” when it equals or exceeds the standards of the Commission on Schools. A school may be “Approved” with Comment@ when it has only minor deviations from a particular standard or standards.

A school is classified as “Advised” when it deviates from one or more standards. Schools will also be placed on the “Advised” list when no observable effort has been made, by the second year, to correct deviations from a standard upon which comment was previously made. An “Approved” with Comment@ classification need not precede an “Advised” classification.

A school is classified as “Warned” when it substantially deviates from one or more standards. A “Warned” classification is usually given after a school has been “Advised” and the deviation persists. A school may be moved from “Approved” to “Warned” when the deviations are such that they should not be allowed to persist beyond the current year. A school shall be “Dropped” from membership after two consecutive “Warned” assignments, with the understanding that the SAC has the authority to liberalize this rule. If such an exception is made, it should be followed with an explanation by the SAC. Schools receiving a “Dropped” status have the right to appeal as outlined in the *Bylaws of the Commission on Schools*.

Self-Study and Evaluation

- 1. For initial accreditation, a self-evaluation (self-study) shall be carried out by faculty, students, and community representatives according to the procedures of the Commission on Schools.
- 2. An assessment of the educational program of a school seeking initial accreditation shall be made by a Preliminary Visitation Team with its members serving as the official representatives of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges.
- 3. The Preliminary Visitation Team shall appraise the quality and comprehensiveness of the school’s self-study, make professional recommendations for further study and implementation, and assess the extent to which standards are being met.
- 4. Following the full six-year evaluation, schools must address recommendations, establish goals, and implement processes to reach goals. A statement of plans must be completed within one year of the full evaluation. The SAC may require an interim (3-5 years) conference or report which documents/evaluates progress made toward meeting the accreditation recommendations of the six-year evaluation.
- 5. During the fifth and sixth years following initial and subsequent self-studies, staff of accredited schools and systems shall engage in new self-studies as an integral part of the ongoing process of school improvement.
- 6. The self-studies shall be initiated during the fifth year and completed during the sixth year and shall be conducted according to procedures of the Commission on Schools.

Standards

Standard I.....	Educational Program
Standard II.....	Student Personnel Services
Standard III.....	School Plant and Equipment
Standard IV.....	Library Media Program
Standard V.....	Records
Standard VI.....	School Improvement
Standard VII.....	Preparation of Personnel
Standard VIII.....	Administration
Standard IX.....	Teacher Load
Standard X.....	Student Activities

STANDARD IV - Library Media Program

ALL SCHOOLS

PRINCIPLE:

The school library media program is a primary resource for literacy, information, and curriculum support. The school library media program, through the coordination efforts of a certified library media specialist, contributes to the achievement of the desired results for student learning by providing instruction, resources, and activities that enable students and staff to become effective, independent users of ideas and information for lifelong learning.

A. Desired Results for Student Learning

1. Students demonstrate the ability to locate, evaluate, interpret, and communicate information and ideas for intellectual development, personal enjoyment, and lifelong learning.
2. Students demonstrate media literacy skills including ethical use of information and information technology.
3. Students demonstrate the ability to learn independently and adopt habits and attitudes of lifelong learning.
4. Students demonstrate the ability to recognize and identify their information needs and show self-confidence in solving information problems.
5. Students develop media literacy skills and critical thinking processes necessary to analyze information and opinions in order to develop new understandings and make informed decisions.
6. Students demonstrate the ability to explore the ideas and creative achievements of a variety of people from many cultures and times.

B. Access

The library media program is available to individual students and class groups throughout the day.

C. Staffing

The library media program is supervised by a certified library media specialist.

1. Schools with an **enrollment exceeding 250** have a full-time certified library media specialist.
2. Schools with more than **500 students** have additional library media personnel.
3. Library staff in schools of **fewer than 251 students** need not be certified, but are under the supervision of a certified library media specialist.
4. Non-certified personnel are under the supervision of a certified library media specialist.

D. Facilities

1. The library media facility provides an inviting environment that is conducive to student learning.
2. The library media facility is of sufficient size and flexibility to accommodate a variety of functions simultaneously.

School Improvement Process Accreditation Standards

E. Resources

1. Sufficient financial resources are available annually to provide space, time, materials equipment, and media access to maximize potential for all students.
2. The collection is renewed annually at a minimum rate of five percent of the total collection.
3. The library media program provides print, non-print, and electronic materials that directly support school goals and curriculum reflecting a diversity of learning styles, levels of skill, and cultural differences.
4. The library media program provides a quality fiction and nonfiction collection that reflects students' individual reading levels and interests.
5. The collection is augmented by the use of community and global resources.
6. Electronic resources are available to provide technical access in proportion to the number of students being simultaneously served.
7. A written selection policy, including a challenged material's statement, is used to continually evaluate the quality, depth, and breadth of the collection.
8. All library media materials are cataloged and accessible.
9. The school has a minimum number of volumes, exclusive of government documents and textbooks as follows:
 - a. **Middle level and high schools with enrollments of fewer than 200** students have a minimum of 2,500 volumes.
 - b. **Middle level and high schools with enrollment equal to or greater than 200 must** have a minimum of 10 volumes per student, but need not exceed 12,500 volumes.
 - c. **Elementary, K-12, and special purpose schools** have a minimum of 15 volumes per student or 3,000 volumes, whichever is greater, but need not exceed 12,500 volumes.

NOTE: A variance of up to 50% shall be allowed for schools supplementing their nonfiction collection with equivalent volumes using electronic access and/or microfiche.

F. Alternative Resources

If outside resources are used to meet standards, those resources are listed and a description of how they are used must be provided.